

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 L-03 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 OMB-01 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6054

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMUSMACHTAI BKK THAI

17TH AD UDORN AB THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 26804

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, MILI, TH

SUBJECT: PRESS REPORT: U.S. RESIDUAL IN THAILAND

1. FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM ARTICLE BY MICHAEL MORROW IN DEC. 26 ISSUE OF FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW: QTE KORAT AIR BASE, THAILAND: A RESIDUAL FORCE OF 3,000 AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISERS AND TECHNICIANS MAY BE LEFT BEHIND AFTER U.S. AIR BASES IN THAILAND CLOSE NEXT FEBRUARY, THE REVIEW LEARNED HERE AS THE FINAL AMERICAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT STATIONED AT THIS HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT BASE FLEW OUT, BOUND FOR THE UNITED STATES, LAST WEEK.

WITH THE FATE OF THAI-U.S. MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS STILL UNDER DISCUSSION AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS, OFFICIAL BRIEFINGS GIVEN TO JOURNALISTS INDICATED AN AMERICAN MILITARY CONTINGENT WILL STAY BEHIND AT KORAT AND ELSEWHERE EVEN AFTER THE AIR FORCE UNITS DISMANTLING THE TACTICAL AIR PRESENCE HAVE LEFT IN FEBRUARY. OUTSIDE THE BRIEFING ROOM, THE 3,000-MAN FIGURE WAS RELIABLY HEARD, SUGGESTING A LARGER MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND IN THE FUTURE THAN HAD BEEN CONSIDERED LIKELY.

IN A BRIEFING PRESIDED OVER BY GENERAL W.H. BAXTER, HEAD OF THE 17TH AIR DIVISION, AND COLONEL NEIL EDDINS, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE 388TH TACTICAL FIGHTER WING, REPORTERS WERE TOLD  
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THAT FROM AN ALL-TIME HIGH OF 7,200 MEN DURING 1972, AIR FORCE

PERSONNEL NOW NUMBER ROUGHLY 2,800 WITH REMAINING PERSONNEL IN THE PROCESS OF LEAVING.

IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, HOWEVER, JOURNALISTS WERE TOLD THAT THE FATE OF A MUNITIONS STORAGE AREA AT KORAT REMAINED UNDECIDED, WITH THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. WOULD RETAIN CONTROL OF MUNITIONS AND WOULD STATION JOINT U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE GROUP (JUSMAG) PERSONNEL AT THE MUNITIONS DUMP....

THAI STUDENTS HAVE ALSO ACCUSED THE U.S. OF KEEPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AT KORAT, AND THIS ACCUSATION WAS PRINTED IN KORAT NEWSPAPERS LAST WEEK. HOWEVER, AN AMERICAN EMBASSY SPOKESMAN CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT NUCLEAR WEAPONS HAVE EVER BEEN KEPT AT THE BASE.

AT 7 AM. ON DECEMBER 15, THE LAST AMERICAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT STATIONED AT KORAT -- AN A-7D JET FIGHTER-BOMBER -- TOOK OFF UNDER COLD, STEELY SKIES. ONLY A SQUADRON OF F-4 PHANTOMS REMAINED AT NEIGHBORING UDORN AIR BASE OF AN AMERICAN COMBAT FLEET THAT ONCE TOTALED SEVERAL HUNDRED AIRCRAFT, AND THE LAST 10 PHANTOMS WERE DUE TO LEAVE THREE DAYS LATER. THE AIRCRAFT DEPART WITH THE FATE OF THAI-AMERICAN MILITARY RELATIONS STILL IN THE BALANCE.

AT THE KORAT BRIEFING, GEN. BAXTER, WHO WAS ALSO FLANKED BY THE THAI BASE COMMANDER, LTC THAVORN KERDSIN, INDICATED THAT THE U.S. WOULD ALSO LIKE TO RETAIN A PRESENCE AT TWO MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS SITES IN THAILAND -- RAMASUN AND KO KHA. THIS HAS BEEN SAID BEFORE, AND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED IN PRINCIPLE BY THAI OFFICIALS NOW INVOLVED IN RENEGOTIATING BILATERAL SECURITY RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON. THE BRIEFING PROVIDED FIRST MENTION, HOWEVER, OF A STAY-BEHIND PRESENCE AT KORAT AND OF POSSIBLE FUTURE U.S. WEAPONS AND MUNITIONS STORAGE.

IN PEGGING THE U.S. RESIDUAL FORCE (A TERM FIRST USED BY EX-DEFENSE SECRETARY JAMES SCHLESINGER) AT 3,000, A WELL-INFORMED SOURCE SAID U.S. MILITARY TECHNICIANS WOULD LIKELY BE KEPT ON FOR THE TIME BEING TO HELP MAN AN AMERICAN-BUILT INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND TACTICAL RADAR NET COVERING THAILAND, BOTH OF WHICH ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND. THE CONTINGENT WOULD TECHNICALLY BE AN EXTENSION OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY THROUGH JUSMAG UNQTE.

2. WE DO NOT KNOW WHO (CLEARLY U.S.) WAS THE SOURCE OF MORROW'S QUITE ACCURATE STORY. ONE THAI-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER ALREADY HAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLISHED A STORY BASED ON THE ARTICLE, AND WE EXPECT MORE TO FOLLOW. IN RESPONSE TO PRESS QUERIES ABOUT THE MORROW ARTICLE, WE INTEND TO REPLY -- AND RECOMMEND U.S. SPOKESMEN ELSEWHERE REPLY: QTE THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND IS THE SUBJECT OF CONTINUING DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE USG AND RTG. ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS RESULTING FROM THOSE DISCUSSIONS WILL BE MADE BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS UNQTE.  
WHITEHOUSE

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